

Ephesians 5:15–33 and Marriage

Prayer

Introductory Questions

- How did your parents' relationship with one another impact your view of marriage?
- What are some of the threats to a lifelong, godly marriage?

Overview of the Lesson

Ephesians 5:15–21 calls us to live wisely and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In 5:22–33, we learn how the Spirit shapes the ways we think about marriage and function within it.

Oftentimes, the biggest obstacles to properly understanding God's design for marriage as outlined in Scripture are *our assumptions* about men, women, and how they should relate in marriage. The chart below outlines four positions (the top row) in light of three categories (the far-left column). *Male supremacy* suggests that males lead females in their marriages, males are inherently superior to females in personhood and value, and females exist ultimately to serve males. On the other end of the continuum, *female supremacy* suggests the opposite: females lead males, females are inherently superior to males, and males exist ultimately to serve females. *Egalitarianism* suggests that there are no distinctions between males and females in marriage, other than biology. *Complementarianism* (males and females complement one another) suggests that God calls males to lead females in marriage, males are equal to females in personhood and value, and males are the ultimate servant-sacrificers in their marriages.

	Male Supremacy	Complementarianism	Egalitarianism	Female Supremacy
Leadership / Authority	M F	M F	M = F	F M
Personhood & Value	M F	M = F	M = F	F M
Ultimate Servant	M F	F M	M = F	F M

We organize Ephesians 5:15–33 into three sections: (1) Wise, Spirit-filled Living (vv. 15–21), (2) A Wife's Submission (vv. 22–24, 33), and (3) A Husband's Love (vv. 25–33). We conclude this lesson by summarizing characteristics of a God-centered marriage.

1. Wise, Spirit-filled Living

15 Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—
 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So don't be foolish, but
 understand what the Lord's will is. 18 And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless
 living, but be filled by the Spirit: 19 speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual
 songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for
 everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one
 another in the fear of Christ. (Eph. 5:15–21)

The apostle Paul calls us to pay close attention to how we *walk*—a figure of speech that points to *how we live* (v. 15; cf. 4:17; 5:2, 8). We should not live as unwise people, but as those who are wise. In the Bible, wisdom is the skillful application of knowledge to do God's will. One way wisdom expresses itself is by “making the most of the time,” for the days are evil and we need wisdom to obey God (v. 16). Therefore, we should not be foolish, but we should seek to know and do the Lord's will as it is revealed in Scripture (v. 17). We must not get drunk with wine (or any other substance), but we should be filled with (under the influence of) the Spirit (v. 18). The Spirit guides and empowers us to teach and admonish one another through songs (v. 19; cf. Col. 3:16); to sing and make music to the Lord (v. 19); to give thanks to God for everything (v. 20); and to submit to one another (v. 21). *To submit means to defer to another's authority and do as they say—provided they do not ask us to sin against God* (cf. Acts 4:17–20). Paul then explains three ways that Christians should submit to one another—wives to husbands (5:22–33), children to parents (6:1–4), and slaves to masters (6:5–9). God also calls us to submit to other authorities—to church leaders (Heb. 13:17), to the government (Rom. 13:1–7), and ultimately and most importantly to Jesus himself (Col. 1:18)!

- Why does God place such a strong emphasis on authority structures?
- How do verses 15–20 apply within marriage?

2. A Wife's Submission

- “22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, 23 because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.” (Eph. 5:22–24)
- “To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.” (Eph. 5:33)

God calls wives to submit to their own husbands (not to all men) as an act of obedience to the Lord Jesus (v. 22). Why? “Because the husband is the head [the authority] of the wife as Christ is the head [the authority] of the church” (v. 23; cf. Col. 1:18). In this way, the roles of

men and women in marriage are grounded in the relationship of Christ and the church, of which Jesus is the Savior. A wife's responsibility to submit to her husband is rooted in her submission to Christ and is comprehensive: "Now *as the church submits to Christ*, so also wives are to submit to their husbands *in everything*" (v. 24). Paul addresses wives again in verse 33: wives must be respectful to their husbands, even when their husbands are not obedient to the Word of God, even when they are not worthy of respect (v. 33; cf. 1 Pet. 3:1–2).

- What does it mean for a wife to submit to her husband? What does it *not* mean?
- How can a husband make it *easier* for a wife to submit? How can he make it *more difficult*?

3. A Husband's Love

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her
 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to
 present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but
 holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies.
 He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides
 and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 since we are members of his body.
 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the
 two will become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and
 the church. 33 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to
 respect her husband. (Eph. 5:25–33)

Husbands must love their wives (vv. 25, 28, 33; cf. Titus 2:4). Love is a disposition of the heart and mind that moves toward the best interests of another. The model of love for husbands to follow is Jesus's sacrificial death for the church. Jesus gave himself up to make the church holy (to set the church apart for himself) and to purify her through the Word (vv. 26–27). In the same way that Christ loved the church, husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies; to love one's wife is to love oneself (v. 28). We do not hate our own bodies, but we provide and care for our bodies, just as Christ provides and cares for the church, since we are part of his body (the church) (vv. 29–30). A husband's love for his wife is grounded in the truth that in marriage "the two...become one flesh" (v. 31; see Gen. 2:24). Marriage, from the very beginning, pointed forward to the union of Christ and the church (v. 32).

- What obstacles interfere with men loving their wives as Christ loved the church?
- What are examples of how husbands can express love for their wives?

Sound Doctrine: Marriage

Below we identify four characteristics of a God-centered marriage.

1. **A commitment to love God and Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.** God calls each of us to love him and Jesus Christ above all (Matt. 22:37; John 14:15). The most stable, God honoring marriages consist of two individuals who are both committed to loving, worshipping, trusting in, and hoping in God above all. One of the primary ways we express our love for God is *through our obedience*:
 - Both males and females should seek to grow in the context of Christian community (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–37; 1 Cor. 11–14; Heb. 10:19–25).
 - Both should “make disciples of all nations” as their life mission (Matt. 28:18–20).
 - Both should “put off” ungodly character traits and “put on” godly character traits (Gal. 5:16–26; Col. 3:5–17).
 - Both should protect their marriages from external threats (Matt. 5:27–30; Heb. 13:4).
 - Both should partner in raising obedient children who love God and love people (Deut. 6; Eph. 6:1–4; Col. 3:20–21).
2. **A proper perspective on the many commonalities between males and females:**
 - Both male and females bear God’s image (Gen. 1:26–28).
 - Both have a sinful disposition and commit sins (Rom. 3:9–20).
 - Both have access to know God through Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:25–29).
 - Both have equal sexual rights within marriage (1 Cor. 7:3–5).
 - Both are coheirs of God’s grace in this life and the next (1 Pet. 3:7).

In these ways and others, husbands and wives must recognize one another’s common need for God, and recognize one another’s worth, intelligence, and abilities.
3. **A proper perspective on a wife’s unique role in marriage.** God calls wives to “submit,” “obey,” and to recognize their husbands as their “head” (*Eph. 5:22–24*; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1, 6, Titus 2:5; *1 Cor. 11:3*). [The italicized verses are rooted in transcultural categories.] This is no way minimizes wives’ worth, the appropriateness of expressing themselves, and the importance of their service to God (Prov. 31; Acts 18:26; 1 Tim. 5:14; Titus 2:3–5).
4. **A proper perspective on a husband’s unique role in marriage.** God calls men to lead their wives by providing direction and being ultimately accountable to God for their families (Gen. 3:9–12). God also calls men to be the ultimate servants, sacrificers, and protectors (Eph. 5:25; Mark 10:43–45). Husbands have a unique call to lay their lives down for their wives, and to demonstrate understanding and care (Eph. 5:28–30; 1 Pet. 3:7).

- What comments and questions do you have about this lesson?
- What is one thing you can do in response to this lesson?

Prayer

Applying God's Word

Use these two pages to reflect on this lesson and/or your personal Bible reading during the week. Schedule a time to discuss your answers, and to pray with family members and friends.

1. Review Your Week

- a. Why are you thankful to God for his work in and around you?
- b. What challenges are you currently facing?
- c. How do you want others to pray for you?

2. Renew Your Mind

Identify one or more Bible passages through which God has spoken to you. With that in mind:

- a. What are you learning about **God the Father, God the Son, and/or God the Holy Spirit** (concerning their character qualities, words, and/or actions)?
- b. What are you realizing about **your sinful tendencies** (concerning your desires, values, thoughts, words, and/or actions)? “I sin against God by _____.”
- c. What are you learning about **God's will for your life** (concerning your desires, values, thoughts, words, and/or actions)? “God desires that I _____.”

3. Obey the Word

Identify one or more ways you want to apply what you are learning from God's Word:

- a. How do you want to grow in **your character**? "By God's grace, I want to become more (or less) _____. I will work on that by _____."
- b. How can you apply God's Word in **your words and/or actions** (with your family, church community, neighbors, and/or coworkers)? "By God's grace, I will _____."
- c. Are there one or more verses of Scripture you want to memorize? If so, which one(s)?

4. Express Your Desires

Spend time praying:

- a. for yourself and for one another
- b. for other Christians in your life
- c. for the non-Christians in your life
- d. for government leaders and concerns throughout the world